

riot and rebellion in American history.” Goldstein argued that riots need a “trigger” or a “precipitating event” to begin. (111-112)

Goldstein demonstrated that the precipitating event for a riot may take place well before the violence because members of the pending riot may need to “plan and mobilize.” In this context, the precipitating events serve to “confirm the threatening nature of the target group, mobilize ordinary citizens and justify the violence they are about to perpetrate.” Such events could be: “ethnic processions, demonstrations, and mass meetings.” These types of events show participants that there are a number of other citizens who are similarly motivated and that if action is taken, it will be done in unison. Therefore, the white supremacy parades, Red Shirt rallies and WGU meetings, combined with the mass meeting on November 9 at which the White Declaration of Independence was passed, could all be considered triggers for the violence of November 10. (114)

Following Goldstein’s theories further, riots follow a “common progression” of triggering mechanisms before a final “flashpoint” ignites the riot. Riots begin well before violence breaks out with broad, non-specific factors, including “media sensationalism,” widespread rumors, a large population of unemployed males, and the expectation that rioting will result in change. He believed that any number of sudden, immediate events could trigger a riot. Other events in the progress of the riot, such as “seeing friends and allies under attack, the desecration or flourishing of flags, statues, or other sacred symbols” or the “appearance of an especially tempting target” or “particular enemy figure” sustain the riot and act as new triggers to perpetuate the violence. Using his psychological theory, the end of a riot happens when police or authority figures stop the violence in a variety of ways – through distractions, re-individuation, dispersion, isolation of leaders – or when “participants come to believe they have succeeded in their goals.”(112-113)

Psychologists have observed that riots develop a life of their own once they begin. The first stage of the riot is an attack on property and the riot then moves to attacks on people. As the riot grows and more people join in, the duration of the riot depends on the resistance met by rioters, their organization and leadership, the “success” of their violence and the “degree to which extant authorities send permissive signals encouraging continuance or vigorously intervene.” The riot may also spread to other areas, sometimes distant from the precipitating site, because of several factors. In the case of Wilmington, the spread of the riot from one side of town to another was due to “overt ratification of violence” by leadership such as Waddell and a “new precipitating event at the new location” such as the argument over occupation of the street corners at Fourth and Harnett. Goldstein explained that riot sites “tend to be urban, mixed ethnic residential, close to the location of the attacker’s homes and at the borderlines or boundaries” where the two opposing sides meet. Goldstein clearly described the violence in Wilmington – the area of the first murders, the intersection Fourth and Harnett Streets, was a mixed neighborhood on the borders of both the black and white neighborhoods and many of the earliest rioters in that section of town were residents of the area.(114-115)